

Former coach liked sports better than eat'n, sleep'n

By MIKE WIXON

Press Sports Editor

Sports have been as much a part of Robert H. "Bobby" Holmes' life as eating and sleeping. In fact, athletic pursuits probably were more important to him at times than getting the necessary nourishment and rest.

No doubt, the former Moss Point head football coach and athletic director missed more than one meal because of practice and lost countless hours of sleep after a loss. But to Holmes, that was just part of the job.

Holmes will be honored for his 34 years as a coach, teacher and administrator with his induction into the Mississippi Association of Coaches Hall of Fame July 26 in Jackson. The ceremonies will be held at the Holiday Inn Downtown beginning at 7 p.m.

The 56-year-old Holmes, who played college football at then Perkinston Junior College and Mississippi Southern College, is a little embarrassed by his selection to the MAC Hall of Fame.

"I guess they reached the bottom of the barrel," he said with a chuckle at his home recently.

than any victory."

Holmes is a firm believer that lessons learned on the football field will continue into life after the gridiron.

"I remember going to Jackson Provine one year and getting whipped 42-7. We just about got killed. If anybody else had gotten hurt, we couldn't have fielded a team.

"The next week we were playing Gulfport and this was when Gulfport was a powerhouse. Now I've got to convince our kids we can play with them.

"We played them 6-6 with a minute to go and lost 12-6.

"Kids are bound to get something out of that, don't you think?"

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There is a fine line that separates winning and having fun from winning at all costs. Holmes' teams never crossed that line.

"I remember telling the kids when school was out, 'Forget about football. Go swimming or play golf.'

"Whether that was right or wrong I don't know, but that's the way I feel about it.

"Why give up everything for football when only one percent is going to make it in college or the pros? That one percent would

shares, which he would just as soon forget (or have broken), is most passes intercepted in a game (four) which came in Holmes' first outing at Southern — a 71-7 shellacking at the hands of Kentucky. The Wildcats were coached by none other than Bear Bryant and were quarterbacked by Babe Parilli.

College teams didn't pass much in those days, but Southern end Cliff Coggin established a national record in '49 for most passes caught in a season (53) that broke the old mark of 52 held by Ole Miss' Barney Poole. At the throwing end of most of Coggin's receptions was Holmes.

Holmes also holds the school record for longest punt return. He accomplished that the first time he ever returned a punt in college. The 95-yarder went for a touchdown against Alabama. He also returned another punt 77 yards for a score in that game.

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Holmes met his wife, the former Bobbie Nell Germaney of Moss Point, at Perkinston and he knew a beauty when he saw one. His future wife was runner-up in the 1948 Miss Mississippi beauty pageant. She was also Miss Moss Point High School, Miss Perkinston Junior College and Miss Jackson County.

They were married in September 1951 after Holmes



Robert H. 'Bobby' Holmes and wife Bobbie

their tour of duty at Fort

touchdown was the greatest

days was the tragic death of

"It's hard to put into words how I feel. If you go by statistics — wins and losses — I don't deserve it," he said. "But if you go by enjoying what you did and teaching kids how to enjoy sports, how to be competitive and seeing them turn out to be successes in life, then I do deserve it."

Holmes' Moss Point teams won about 46 percent of their games during his tenure as head coach from 1961 to 1967. Moss Point had an enrollment of approximately 700 in those days, and was one of the smallest schools in the once-powerful Big 8 Conference. Against schools more comparable in size, Moss Point won 60 percent of its games under Holmes.

After leaving the coaching ranks, Holmes served as athletic director for 10 years. Since then he has worked in the Moss Point school system as an assistant principal and assistant vocational director.

Holmes is a walking history book on football. He can remember dates, scores, downs and plays like they happened yesterday. His wife Bobbie marvels at her husband's memory.

"We have people call us up late at night and they're having an argument about a score and they say, 'Call coach Holmes. He'll know the score,'" said his wife of 34 years.

Holmes' interest in coaching was spawned when he was 13 or 14 years old. "I guess I always knew I would be a coach," he said. The man responsible for that interest was J.E. "Hot" O'Brien, Holmes' high school coach at Tallahassee, Ala.

"What he taught me more than things about character and morale was competitiveness," explained Holmes. "I think I learned that playing dominoes with him. He beat me 21 times

probs? That one percent would probably make it anyway."

Holmes also didn't have room for prima donnas on his team. "The first thing I told them on the first day of practice, 'If you are up here to feed your ego, then go back up on the hill and strut your stuff. We don't need you,'" he said.

He related another incident that indicates how sports have changed over the years.

"One year when I was athletic director we had a player get into trouble with an official. The official really could have burned us but he didn't."

"I talked to the boy's coach and said, 'Now you're the coach and you can do what you want to, but I think you should discipline him.'"

"You know what the first thing he said to me. I could have fell out. That's when I first knew things was changing. He said, 'I can't play without him.'"

"Can't play without him! You know the kids know that. You convey that over to the kids and you've got problems."

"You've got a captive audience. If they don't want to play they wouldn't be out there. You've got them."

"I don't see how it switched around, the athlete got the upper hand in some respects. I think they hurt themselves in the long run, really."

Holmes began his athletic career in his home town of Tallahassee, Ala., in 1943. He played single-wing tailback for three undefeated teams during a stretch of 58 victories under coach O'Brien. The unbeaten streak once stood as a national prep record.

The highlight of Holmes' prep days came in 1946 when Tallahassee beat the powerful and much larger Sidney Lanier Poets 12-0 before 18,000 fans in

They were married in September 1951 after Holmes had graduated from Southern. Mrs. Holmes is familiar to local residents as she has operated Moss Point Kindergarten and Nursery for the past 23 years.

"She had to be the rock," Holmes said of his wife. "You know how much we coaches are gone."

Mrs. Holmes said being a coach's wife wasn't hard, "because I love sports. The first thing I read in the newspaper is the sports section."

Holmes and his wife have two children — Hal and Nollene — and three grandchildren. Hal, who is married to the former Cindy Alford of Moss Point, was the Tigers' quarterback on the 1974 team that went 10-1. He is now Picaune's head baseball coach. Nollene was a cheerleader at Moss Point. She is married to former Moss Point athlete and Biloxi coach Spud Wientewitz.

"It means a whole lot when Hal followed me into coaching," said Holmes. "Of course Nollene married one (a coach) too. Both turned out to be fine adults. You have to give their mother credit for that."

Holmes' first coaching job was, ironically, at Pascagoula in '51. He was brought to the coast by Thomas F. "Dutch" Binion to coach at the junior high. He had worked only two months when he was drafted into the service.

Holmes didn't worry long about being sent to Korea, however. His Perk roommate, Ray Wheat, was a corporal where Holmes was stationed at Fort Jackson in Columbia, S.C. Wheat informed the captain at Melton's (Holmes' teammate at Tallahassee and Perk) football background. Needless to say, Holmes and Melton played out

their tour of duty at Fort Jackson. A teammate of theirs at the time was Hugh Pepper, longtime Ocean Springs head football coach.

Following the service, Holmes returned to the coast and served one year as an assistant at Biloxi ('53) and two years at Pascagoula ('54-'55) under Don Gibson. An assistant with Holmes at 'Goula was Dr. H.K. Seay, now interim

superintendent of education at Pascagoula High School. Three years as an assistant followed at Laurel and two more at Perkinson Junior College before Holmes took his first head coaching position with Moss Point in 1961.

Holmes' best team was probably the Bruce James-led squad in 1966 which posted an 8-1-1 record. James later became an All-America at Arkansas as a defensive end.

The '66 game against arch-rival Pascagoula is one of Holmes' most memorable moments. In that game, Pascagoula took a 7-0 lead at halftime. When the teams returned for the second half a torrential downpour had turned the playing field at War Memorial Stadium into what Holmes called "a sea."

Despite the steady downpour, the Tigers drove 70 yards for a touchdown to cut the lead to 7-6. On the extra point kick, the snap sailed through holder Doug Hassell's hands. Hassell managed to retrieve the ball and lofted a pass blindly to the corner of the end zone as he was being hit. Jimmy Miller caught the pass and fell into the end zone as he was being tackled for the one-point conversion to tie the game (all extra points at that time counted for one point). "That drive to score the

touchdown was the greatest effort I ever saw put forth on a football field," Holmes related. "And I bet a lot of people thought us making the extra point was luck. It wasn't. We practiced that play almost every day, and Hassell and Miller knew what to do in case of a bad snap."

The hardest thing for Holmes to accept during his coaching days was the tragic death of three of his players after the '64 season. The players — Tommy Huff, Andrew Dunn and David Breese — died while hunting when their boat capsized on a freezing winter day.

"For years I didn't buy those jerseys," Holmes said. "I didn't want the people in the stands to see those numbers on the field. See COACH..... Page 8"

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"We had just started building and I think those kids' death really set us back."

Holmes doesn't like to single out players for fear of leaving somebody out. But he did want to tell the story about one of the most dedicated players he coached.

"It was a couple weeks before our first game in 1967 against Gulfport and our little guard Richard Huff broke his wrist," Holmes remembered. "You know something, he missed the rest of that practice, but didn't miss another day. He was out at practice the next day doing one-armed push ups."

"Huff kept saying he would be ready to play the first game and, sure enough, the day before the

game he showed up without his cast. "I asked him if the doctor took it off and he said yes. What I later found out was that Huff had told the doctor, who was also our school board president, he was getting behind in his studies and wanted the cast off so he could do his school work."

"Well, Huff kept saying he could play. So we started talking. We knew we couldn't let him play with a cast, so Lavell White (a Moss Point assistant) came up with the idea to cut a cardboard tape can in half and put it on Huff's arm and wrap it with a couple rolls of tape."

"You know something, Huff played every snap and graded out at 98 percent."

BONELESS	LB.	1	J.P.	LB.	1
CHUCK ROAST..	LB.	1.39	BACON	12 oz.	1.19
BONELESS	LB.	1.49	MAGNOLIA SLAB	12 oz.	1.19
CHUCK STEAKS.	LB.	1.49	SLICED BACON..	10 LB.	1.39
BONELESS	LB.	1.29	BONELESS SHOULDER	LB.	1.59
PORK STEAKS...	LB.	1.29	STEAK.....	LB.	1.59
J.P.	LB.	1.29	STORE SLICED-SPICED	LB.	1.59
WIENERS	12 oz.	79¢	LUNCHEON MEAT ..	LB.	1.69
RIB EYE	LB.	3.89			
STEAKS.....	LB.	3.89			

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Holmes
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explained Holmes. "I think I learned that playing dominoes with him. He beat me 21 times straight before I won. But I didn't quit.

"I always tried to teach that in my kids and players. It helps them down the road.

"All kids won't compete. You've got some frontrunners."

Unlike some coaches today, Holmes never lost sight of what he calls the true meaning of athletic competition.

"In the '50s and '60s, I think kids were more dedicated to the right things — teamwork, school, commitment," he said.

"There is too much emphasis on winning and losing today. I'm not knocking the coaches and kids, don't get me wrong, but it's different today. So much is handed to kids. They've got everything — cars, TV, money, more things to distract them.

"Too many kids are dedicated to themselves because they've got that goal, that million dollar contract."

Holmes said his enjoyment from coaching didn't come just with the victories.

"The things I enjoyed the most were the associations I made over the years with coaches, teachers, students, players," he said. "It was more than just football. In my day we thought in terms of kids that went into life and made a success.

"I've got former players who are now doctors, lawyers, Ph.D.s. That's more meaningful

Tallassee beat the powerful and much larger Sidney Lanier Poets 12-0 before 18,000 fans in Montgomery's Cramton Bowl.

He said about that game: "I think the only person left in Tallassee that night was one fireman."

Holmes continued playing football in 1947-48 at Perkinson Junior College and helped the Bulldogs to a perfect 12-0 season. The Bulldogs were supposed to play Compton, Calif., in the Junior Rose Bowl to decide the junior college national championship, but didn't get to play because there wasn't enough money to send both the band and team out west. Perk ended up sharing the national title with Compton.

After Perk, Holmes made the conversion from single-wing tailback to quarterback at Mississippi Southern under Thad "Pie" Vann, and directed the Southerners to a 7-3 record in '49 and a 5-5 mark in '50.

Though he was small at 5-foot-10, 160-pounds, Holmes set several school records. His career passing percentage record of 57.1 (108 of 189) was broken by Jeff Bower in 1973 and his mark for most yards passing in a season was later topped by Tommy Boutwell in 1968. He shares the school record for touchdown passes in a game with four set in '49 against Northwestern Louisiana.

Another record Holmes